

# What is cocoa sustainability? Mapping stakeholders' socio-economic, environmental, and commercial constellations of priorities

JUDITH KRAUSS

*Given growing concerns regarding the chocolate sector's long-term future, more private-sector, public-sector, and civil-society stakeholders have become involved in initiatives seeking to make cocoa more 'sustainable'. However, the commercial, socio-economic, and environmental priorities they associate with the omnipresent, yet polysemic term diverge considerably: while transforming the crop into a more viable livelihood for growers is essential for some, others prioritize the crop's links to global environmental challenges through agroforestry. A third dimension encompasses commercial concerns related to securing supply. The article explores how tensions and synergies manifest in these divergent understandings of what cocoa sustainability is and is to entail, which diverse civil-society, public-sector, and private-sector stakeholders bring to the table. It argues that priorities associated with 'cocoa sustainability' diverge, yielding synergies, tensions, and trade-offs. This article draws on the author's in-depth doctoral fieldwork in cocoa sustainability initiatives incorporating environmental measures, which encompassed semi-structured interviews, focus-group discussions, documentary analysis, and participant observation in Latin America and Europe. It proposes the 'constellations of priorities' model as an instrument to capture how the priorities driving cocoa stakeholders variously dovetail, intersect, and collide. Particularly against the backdrop of the sector's brewing crisis, the paper suggests that stakeholders systematically assess their and other actors' socio-economic, environmental, and commercial priorities as part of the equitable engagement required to transform the sector and attain genuine cocoa sustainability.*

**Keywords:** cocoa sustainability, environment, trade-offs, development studies, standards

THE COCOA SECTOR IS FACING a crisis. Of late, concerns as to whether cocoa production will be able to satisfy rising demand in the long term have grown, particularly among private-sector actors. Given this projected shortfall, an increasing number of stakeholders, from private sector, public sector, and civil society alike, have begun engaging

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in far-reaching ‘sustainability’ initiatives (Glin et al., 2015; Tampe, 2016). Beyond the pre-existing notion of improved socio-environmental circumstances offering an opportunity to cater to consumers that are pressuring companies to show they care (Hughes, 2001), a second thrust now driving engagement with ‘cocoa sustainability’ emanates from a perceived business imperative to safeguard the industry’s long-term viability (Barrientos, 2014). Consequently, the spectrum of stakeholders engaging with sustainability has widened beyond 100 per cent ethical manufacturers, encompassing varied constituencies with divergent understandings of what the omnipresent, but polysemic term means. Some associate primarily commercial priorities with the concept, aiming to safeguard supply in the quality they desire. For others, the socio-economic dimension and in particular livelihood improvement are paramount following decades of shrinking returns for growers. Others prioritize the opportunities for addressing global environmental challenges that cocoa agroforestry systems offer, including conserving biodiversity or combating climate change. In sum, the sector’s predicament has introduced a sense of unprecedented urgency, widening the spectrum of stakeholders and priorities governing cocoa sustainability initiatives.

This paper looks into the question of how tensions and parallels are manifest in stakeholders’ priorities within cocoa sustainability initiatives. It argues that this continuum of diverging understandings regarding what ‘cocoa sustainability’ is or is to entail offers a potential for tensions. Particularly against the backdrop of the variety of private-sector, public-sector, and civil-society stakeholders involved in the industry, it aims to unpack these divergences in priorities, addressing a knowledge gap. In terms of its relevance to broader debates, this paper makes a contribution firstly on the brewing crisis in the cocoa industry, discussing some observations and implications regarding the sector’s long-term viability. Equally, the paper, based on in-depth fieldwork in Europe and Latin America, develops a framework for stakeholders to assess their own and other stakeholders’ drivers in relation to cocoa sustainability. It proposes that the ‘constellations of priorities’ model and its visualization, developed through semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis, focus-group discussions and participant observation, could offer cocoa stakeholders a structure for conversations about synergies and tensions. More broadly, the paper problematizes the inflationary use of ‘sustainability’, painting over stakeholders’ differing definitions and neglecting to engage with whether ‘sustainability’ also entails greater equity. Given the term’s omnipresence, it argues its polysemy merits unpacking and systematic analysis in terms of underlying priorities to address and avoid tensions between stakeholders’ differing objectives.

After some brief context on the current situation in the cocoa-chocolate sector, the paper introduces research design and methods followed by a discussion on the theoretical underpinnings of the ‘constellation of priorities’ model and its three socio-economic, commercial, and environmental dimensions. The paper goes on to demonstrate how, despite multiple overlaps among largely like-minded actors committed to socio-economically viable and carbon-neutral chocolate, stakeholders’ priority constellations showed subtle divergences in a real-world case study. The final section concludes and emphasizes this paper’s implications for wider debates especially in the cocoa sector.

## The context of cocoa sustainability

A consensus emerged among chocolate-sector actors in the early 2010s that there was likely to be a gap between available cocoa supply and demand by 2020 (Thornton, 2010; ICCO, 2012a; Fountain and Hütz-Adams, 2015). Gross global production has averaged 3.76 million metric tonnes (mt) annually between 2004–05 and 2012–13 (ICCO, 2014). The 2014–15 and, according to forecasts, 2015–16 crop seasons have produced 4.24 and 3.99 mt cocoa, respectively (ICCO, 2015a, b, 2016a, b). Fears abounded that global production would not be able to match demand especially from emerging markets, estimated for 2020 between 4.5 million (Fairtrade Foundation, 2011) and 5 million (Hütz-Adams and Fountain, 2012). Irrespective of the precise size of projected shortages, the industry began to ask whether the sector's supply was viable in the long term.

The factors underlying cocoa stakeholders' fears emanate from the socio-economic, environmental, and commercial realms. Commercial concerns in part stem from the successive oligopolies (UNCTAD, 2008) within the cocoa marketplace. Firstly, over two-thirds of global cocoa production hails from Africa, the continent forecast to generate 74 per cent of total cocoa supplies for the 2015–16 cocoa year, with two West African countries, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, contributing c. 60 per cent of the worldwide crop between them (ICCO, 2016a). Beyond this geographical focus, further instances of concentration are observable in both trading and the brand manufacturer segment, dominated by only a handful of companies controlling half their respective marketplaces (UNCTAD, 2008; Candy Industry, 2010, 2017; Fountain and Hütz-Adams, 2015). Beyond these commercial qualms, socio-environmental challenges include the rising average age of cocoa growers in West Africa (ICCO, 2012b): as cocoa returns have been declining for decades, grower populations may shrink as the livelihood is unattractive for young generations (Hainmueller et al., 2011; Fountain and Hütz-Adams, 2015). Equally, there are questions on how to expand capacity-building and farmer organization opportunities across millions of smallholders in terms of logistics and scale (author interview with a private-sector representative, #142). Environmentally, as cocoa only grows within 20 degrees latitude either side of the equator, the surfaces conducive to cocoa cultivation are limited, meaning productivity-maximizing, yet degrading, practices cannot continue indefinitely. Equally, the effects and repercussions of climate change are difficult to forecast (Läderach et al., 2011; Ofori-Boateng and Insa, 2014).

In combination, these factors mean there is uncertainty over how the production of cocoa, and particularly cocoa matching the price and quality stakeholders require, can be safeguarded in the long term, prompting shifts towards 'sustainability' in the sector. As investors' and consumers' awareness of this quandary has exacerbated concerns, this paper argues that aspiring to engage with cocoa sustainability has morphed from nice-to-have to a commercial necessity. Projections of its key ingredient being in short supply have caught the sector's attention, triggering engagement across the niche, mainstream, and low-end market segments identified by Barrientos and Asenso-Okyere (2009). Virtually all major processors and brand-name manufacturers have responded by increasing the share of their 'sustainable'

cocoa supplies, which is often understood to be commodities certified by Fairtrade, UTZ Certified, or Rainforest Alliance (Hütz-Adams and Fountain, 2012; Fountain and Hütz-Adams, 2015). Some stakeholders such as chocolate makers Mars, Ferrero, and Hershey have even pledged to have the entirety of their cocoa volumes certified by 2020 (Nieburg, 2012). Equally, despite all competitiveness in a concentrated marketplace, ever more multi-stakeholder partnerships have been emerging in cocoa (Bitzer et al., 2012). Fundamentally, however, the question also is to what extent do existing certification schemes or multi-stakeholder initiatives promote equity and remedy deep-seated deficiencies that have contributed to the sector's current predicament? Existing power asymmetries between global North and South and private-sector and other stakeholders are palpable in terms of limited opportunities for the global South, declining cocoa prices, and environmental degradation resulting from pressures to maximize productivity.

While this new sense of urgency presents a greater opportunity for civil-society and public-sector actors to find commercial partners for sustainability measures, this business imperative introduces different requirements in terms of initiatives' foci, set-up, and direction, requiring analysis. Also beyond cocoa, certification schemes, in some ways falling victim to their own success, increasingly have to reconcile diverse ethical and commercial stakeholder interests (Doherty et al., 2013), with different schemes pursuing a variety of priorities and principles (KPMG, 2013). The magnitude and scope of the cocoa industry's projected predicament require it to address the diverse socio-economic, environmental, and commercial issues discussed above, which, however, in itself furthers the potential for tensions: protecting long-term supply security as a driver is distinct from wishing to boost growers' socio-economic livelihoods, with addressing global environmental challenges an altogether different motivation. This considerable spectrum of priorities warrants unpacking: this paper thus constructs a framework to analyse different drivers in terms of tensions and congruence in stakeholders' understandings of what cocoa sustainability is and is to entail. This proposed framework, the 'constellations of priorities', is introduced after a brief discussion of research methods in the following paragraphs.

## Research methods and design

The research encompassed voices from European and Latin American contexts all the way from cocoa production to chocolate consumption to conceptualize cocoa-related global production networks holistically (Henderson et al., 2002; Hess and Yeung, 2006). As researching production networks and value chains will require drawing on a variety of sources to unearth relevant information (Kaplinsky and Morris, 2000; Barrientos, 2002), four qualitative research methods were used to triangulate and confirm the data collected, encompassing semi-structured interviews, focus-group discussions, documentary analysis, and participant observation in Europe and Latin America. To capture consumers' perspectives, three focus-group discussions (Morgan, 1997; Bloor et al., 2001) were conducted with European chocolate consumers with an environmental, a social,

**Table 1** Breakdown of types of interlocutors interviewed

<i>Interviews conducted</i>	
Cocoa producers	21
Civil society	18
Cooperatives	7
Research	10
Government	11
Development agencies	11
Private sector	13
Certifiers	5
Total	96

and a business background, respectively. While non-representative, the perspectives nevertheless allowed testing what priorities European consumers associated with cocoa sustainability. Moreover, the study drew on 96 semi-structured interviews with cocoa producers, representatives of cooperatives, non-governmental organization (NGOs), development agencies, government, research, chocolate companies, and retailers (see Table 1).

Interviews elicit only what interlocutors are prepared to share (Laws et al., 2003), which could equally be said of focus-group discussion settings. Consequently, supplementing these methods with documentary analysis and observing events held irrespective of the researcher's presence was a triangulation strategy aimed at reducing researcher bias and broadening data sources. I analysed c. 400 documents, reports, and websites cognizant of their provenance and intended audiences (O'Laughlin, 2007), while also attending nine cocoa-related events for the purposes of participant observation (Jorgensen, 1989; Spradley, 1980). I used Nvivo 5 to code all the transcribed qualitative interviews, focus-group discussions, and notes (Mikkelsen, 2005), while remaining conscious of the need to manage the transition across different sources of data and researcher roles in collecting information. To safeguard confidentiality and as a condition of ethical approval, all participants, organizations, and place names have been anonymized.

## The 'constellations of priorities' model as a conceptual contribution

### *Theoretical underpinnings*

Given priorities' relevance in determining cocoa sustainability initiatives' direction, set-up, and structure, it proved necessary to conceptualize stakeholders' diverse socio-economic, commercial, and environmental drivers that may variously intersect, dovetail, or collide. As Lukes (2005: 109) contends, stakeholders' interests will not be unitary, but manifold. In her 2009 study, Reynolds establishes a tripartite distinction between 'mission'-driven, 'quality'-driven, and 'market'-driven buyers of fair trade coffee supplies. She argues that while the buyers all purchased ethically traded coffee, their motivations differed considerably, entailing palpable consequences for

their engagements. Mission-driven buyers follow an ethical philosophy, seeking to support its principles throughout their commercial operation. By contrast, quality-driven buyers are primarily after gourmet supplies. Market-driven buyers, finally, regard a fair trading seal as a business opportunity, pursuing mainstream business operations beyond their niche engagement. While Reynolds underlines that the buyer types inhabit a continuum rather than distinct categories, mission-driven buyers usually seek to establish a partnership-based setting, whereas market-driven stakeholders prioritize traceability. Reynolds's distinction also recalls another spectrum on which considerable divergences can occur, namely the continuum between stakeholders focusing on overhauling the system and those wishing to uphold, but tweak it (Renard, 2003).

While Reynolds's argument regarding the importance of drivers underlying sustainability engagements is well-taken, her tripartite distinction, while suitable for her research focus, proved nevertheless imperfect for this study for the following reasons. Firstly, regarding the 'quality-driven' category of buyers, convention theory would suggest that what different stakeholders take 'quality' to be will vary, underlining the need for systematic analysis: determinants of high 'quality' may range from market prices via brand considerations or standardization to social and environmental circumstances of production, requiring negotiation between different stakeholders (Fold, 2000; Renard, 2003; Cidell and Alberts, 2006). A second issue is that Reynolds's distinction looks exclusively at fair trading rather than other standards. Thirdly, it solely forefronts the 'buyer' stakeholder type. Reynolds's study (2009) observes that Gereffi et al.'s (2005) fivefold categorization of value chains, establishing five governance types ranging from arm's-length markets to integrated hierarchical connections, is too narrow given the categorization's exclusive focus on lead firms. For the same reason, this paper seeks to develop a classification that is applicable throughout the production network and engages with the priorities of the diverse stakeholder types involved in cocoa sustainability initiatives, as mission-driven, market-driven, and quality-driven are not ideal analytical lenses for non-governmental organizations, producers, or development agencies. Consequently, the objective was to establish a framework able to capture tensions, synergies, and trade-offs between diverse cocoa sustainability stakeholders' sets of priorities.

While convention theory and Reynolds's tripartite distinction served as sources of inspiration, there was a need for a tailor-made model to capture various stakeholders' drivers throughout cocoa sustainability initiatives. Discussing that cocoa production may face competing demands from policy, Franzen and Borgerhoff Mulder (2007: 3836) cite 'improving productivity, reducing negative biodiversity impacts, and increasing the social and economic sustainability of production' as potential goals, highlighting that these competing objectives can require trade-offs. Findings from interviews, participant observation, and documents suggested that, in more abstract terms, stakeholder drivers could be analysed under three dimensions:

- socio-economic factors including, for example, grower livelihoods;
- environmental aspects on local and global scale (Bolwig et al., 2010);
- the commercial level, including safeguarding supply, which was a particular concern for stakeholders from the private sector.

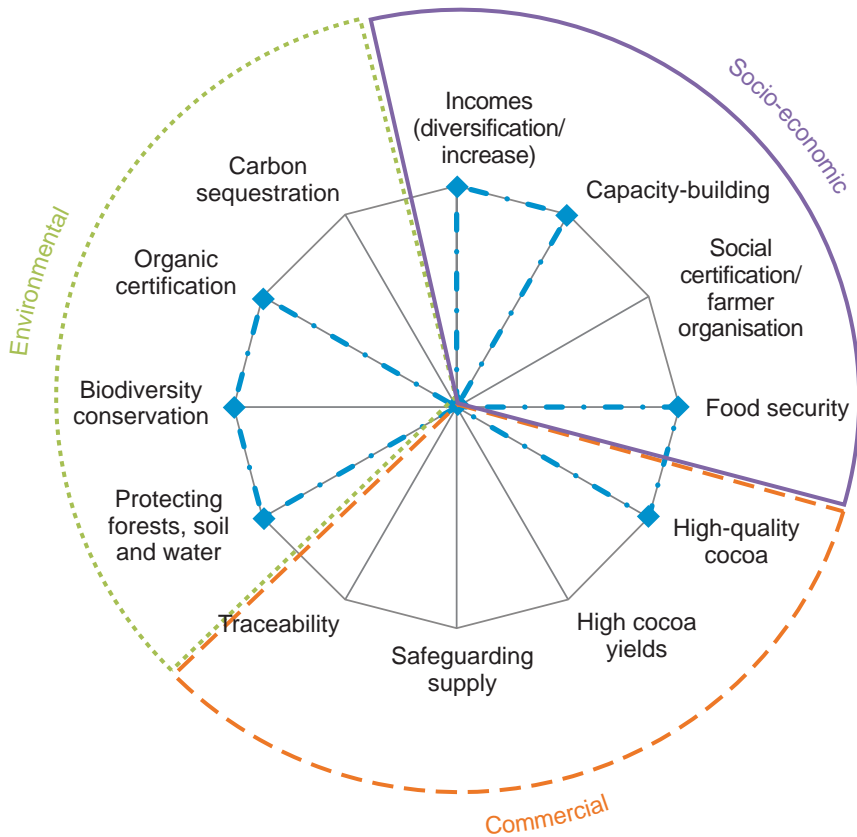
Based on interview, documentary, and focus group data, these three dimensions proved valid starting points for delineating categories of drivers. Franzen and Borgerhoff Mulder's paper (2007) distinguishes between economic vis-à-vis ecological considerations, while the most common conceptualization of the sustainable development triangle discerns social, economic, and environmental aspects. The socio-economic, commercial, and environmental delineation chosen in this model deviates from both: firstly, the paper's chosen distinction emphasizes the difference between private-sector stakeholders pursuing their commercial interests, and socio-economic viability for producers. While both sets of drivers are based in economic-commercial interests, there is a need to distinguish between buyers' interest in keeping cocoa prices low, and producers' socio-economic interest in a living income, as they can be diametrically opposed. Moreover, seeking to boost commercial productivity by thinning out intercropped shade trees may contravene producers' desire for diversified agroforestry systems that can improve food security and protect environmental benefits. Both examples of incongruence and trade-offs thus justify exploring these priorities in distinct domains. This observation recalls the difficulties in reconciling commercial and social objectives in sustainability efforts (Mason and Doherty, 2015), with labels emanating from social movements such as Fairtrade facing a particular challenge by operating within a system that they aspire to change (Nelson, 2014).

### *Mapping different dimensions*

In the 'constellations of priorities' model (see Figure 1), the commercial, environmental, and socio-economic dimensions each encompass four axes symbolizing priorities, many of which are interdependent and interconnected, but partly incompatible. The 12 axes, which do not aim to be exhaustive, partly derive from Franzen and Borgerhoff Mulder (2007), but are mostly based on data collected through this research, reflecting the drivers cited most frequently by interlocutors. My intention is to facilitate systematic (self-)assessments of the 'sustainability' priorities that cocoa stakeholders associate with the concept, although the model, with different axis designations, could be usable in other sectors. The spider-web diagrams shown in Figures 1–5 are only heuristic representations of complex situations, yet visualizations can help stakeholders identify starting points for necessary conversations at a glance. Beyond incongruence between stakeholder drivers, additional tensions may arise from actors' differing notions concerning time frames and spatial scales. The diagrams depict only the binary presence or absence of a driver at a specific time, no ranking or weighting. Moreover, lines between priorities in Figure 1 are meant only as a visual aid and do not indicate whether they are actually connected.

As Figure 1 visualizes, in the socio-economic domain, augmenting and diversifying grower revenues, for instance by way of diverse agroforestry systems, is a key concern (author interviews #142, private sector; #30 and #43, researchers; #69 and #74, development cooperation). Diversified systems spread risk and provide additional income sources (Somarriba et al., 2014), while also making a contribution to the food-security axis. The aspect of farmer organization is





**Figure 1** Constellation of priorities model: fictitious example

crucial for some social certifiers, but also for many development organizations who consider it an option to create long-term, self-sustaining support structures. Farmer organizations are often the vehicle for capacity-building, another axis in the diagram. Trade-offs between different socio-economic priorities may occur: diversified agroforestry increases food security but may reduce yields and thus cocoa-related incomes, while farmer organization and capacity-building ties up funds.

The environmental third of the diagram also encompasses four axes. The carbon sequestration axis represents the priority of afforesting or reforesting spaces in cocoa communities to offset greenhouse gases. A potential trade-off emerges with biodiversity, as tree selection in favour of fast-growing, non-native rather than endemic trees entails an implicit prioritization of reducing carbon (Haggard, 2013). Cocoa buyers interested in carbon neutrality pay additional premiums for carbon credits, linking to socio-economic income diversification. Organic certification is another axis: complying with the standard limits, for instance, usable inputs, but may also bring premium prices for cooperatives and growers (Pay, 2009). Conserving biodiversity is an axis for which cocoa agroforestry systems offer



various opportunities (Tschardt et al., 2015). The final priority is protecting forests, soils, and water, a key motivation for many cocoa producers given their dependence on their environment (author interviews #71, #75, #113, #138, cocoa producers; #30, researcher). For both conservation priorities, a potential trade-off emerges with productivity-maximizing approaches, which may clash particularly with protecting forests.

The commercial sphere occupies the model's final dimension. One commercial motivation is ensuring that cocoa quality lives up to buyers' requirements, with the socio-economic axis of capacity-building a crucial conduit. A further axis is increasing yields, an objective that is in growers' own interest, but may require trade-offs with plantations' long-term environmental viability. The priority may also lead to genetic concentration through hybrid varieties that maximize productivity, but replace higher-maintenance types that can garner higher prices because of their fine-flavour organoleptic parameters and preserve genetic diversity in the long term. Safeguarding supply is a key axis, which is due to gain in importance as shortage concerns intensify over time. However, trade-offs are likely with other axes such as preserving biodiversity or boosting food security. Finally, traceability is an increasing private-sector concern given tightening food safety regulations especially in the global North.

The following section will test this conceptual constellations of priorities model using the empirical case study of World Choc, analysing stakeholders' constellations of priorities before finally discussing synergies and tensions between different actors' drivers. Despite considerable synergistic elements between like-minded partners, there are subtle divergences which resonate with broader sectoral challenges and debates.

## World Choc

### *Stakeholders and priorities*

The 'World Choc' initiative encompasses one chocolate company, two NGOs, growers, and cooperatives in cocoa communities in one African and two Latin American countries, with the chocolate sold through the support of several retailers. The undertaking came about through a confluence of objectives by the three like-minded stakeholders discussed here. Children-for-children NGO Tree kids sought to find a commercial partner able to produce an ethically traded and carbon-neutral chocolate, their intention being to raise awareness and generate funds for their actual key pursuit, which is planting trees to mitigate climate change. Chocolate manufacturer Iller Chocolate, already offsetting chocolate production's carbon emissions in-chain through afforestation projects in cocoa communities, was able and willing to produce the chocolate bar. Environmental NGO Planet Concern, Iller's implementing partner working with cocoa communities, contributed expertise on intercropping cocoa with high-value timber with the dual purpose of sequestering carbon and diversifying growers' incomes. The product of their collaboration, 'World Choc', sells at a child-friendly price of €1, affordable even on limited allowances, and is a sweet

milk chocolate amenable to Tree kids' young constituency. Bearing both a fair and a 'zero-climate' seal, the product is, according to the wrapper (bought in September 2013):

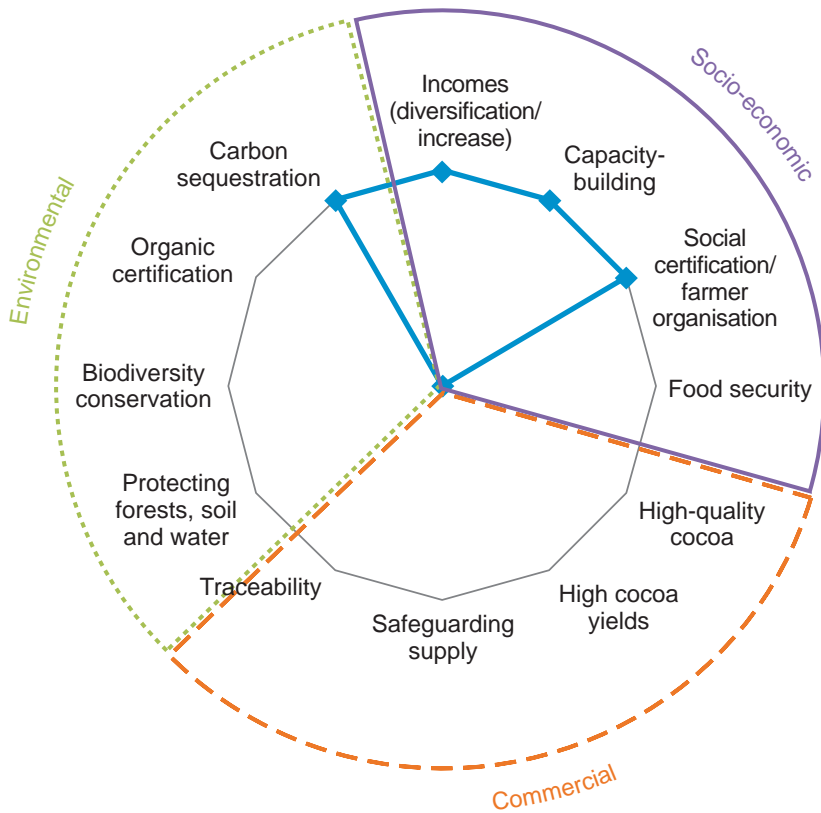
just as we children want all products to be: climate-neutral and fair, because we do not want cocoa farmers' children to harvest cocoa beans for us, but them to go to school like us.

Beyond a certification premium, growers receive additional income from the high-value timber trees which are intercropped with cocoa in agroforestry systems (FHIA, 2007); these afforestation measures also help to offset all carbon emissions generated within the production network (Iller Chocolate, 2012; author interview #26, civil society; #30, researcher).

Given considerable parallels in terms of stakeholders' intentions, there are substantial parallels and thus synergies in terms of like-minded intentions driving the engagement. For instance, all three key stakeholders appear to view the venture as an opportunity to transform conventional wisdom and demonstrate the validity of alternative practices. Nevertheless, an in-depth analysis of different stakeholders' drivers using the constellations of priorities model highlights that there are subtle divergences resonating with a broader need for reflection in the sector.

As Figure 2 illustrates, the key drivers for children-for-children's NGO Tree kids are an environmental aspect, carbon sequestration, and several socio-economic benefits. Their stated intention is that the chocolate bar be fair and ecological twice over (author interview #26, civil society); socio-economically, the 'double fair' adage alludes to growers receiving both the fair trading premium and extra payments for tree management, the objective being to 'tackle poverty at its root'. The NGO supports fair certification, viewing it as the only seal ensuring a better life for cocoa families, through farmer organization and better incomes. The additional premiums for carbon sequestration through tree management diversify income sources. At the same time, agroforestry and thus carbon credits are predicated on capacity-building for growers to support suitable cultivation and monitoring of timber trees' growth. The 'double ecological' representation stems from the argument that beyond Tree kids' own tree-planting efforts, Planet Concern also afforests for each chocolate bar sold. One could argue that their roots as a children's NGO become apparent in this 'twice over' adage and in the goal to 'tackle poverty at its root', given the simplifications inherent in such assessments. For instance, as the constellation of priorities model and the differentiated 'environmental' drivers show, equating tree-planting with an 'ecological' measure is a simplification as diverse stakeholders take diverse drivers to be 'ecological'. Similarly, various scholars in poverty research (e.g. Green and Hulme, 2005; Hickey and Bracking, 2005) would dispute the existence of a 'root' of poverty, emphasizing instead the presence of diverse power and social relations determining who can benefit from opportunities and investment.

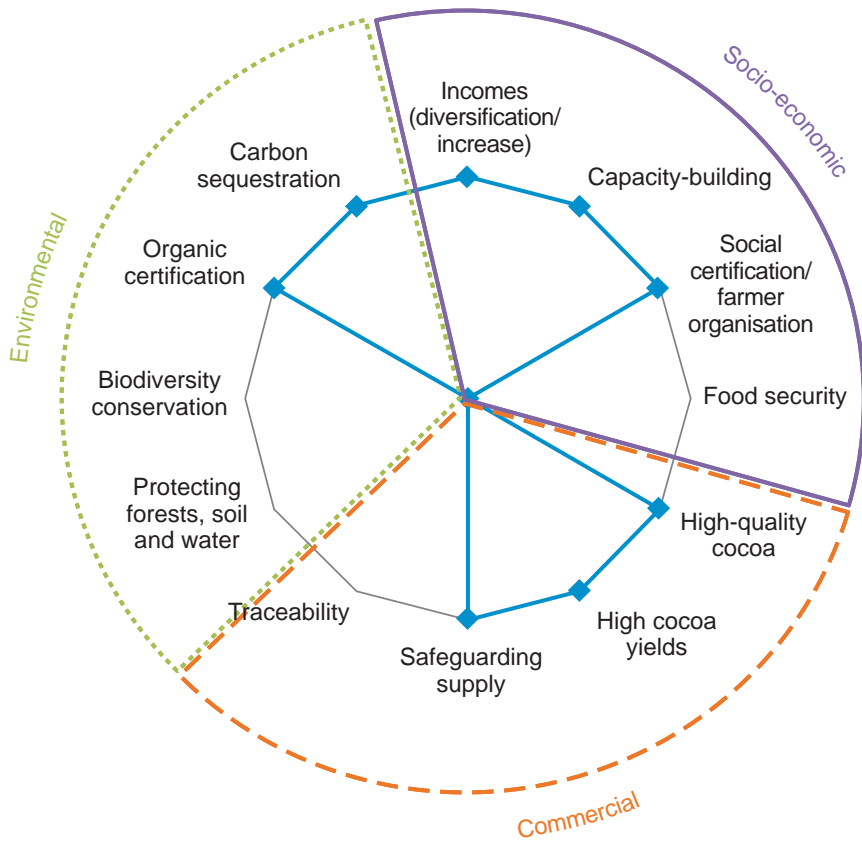
Unlike the environmental and socio-economic domains, the commercial dimension encompassing traceability, supply security, high cocoa yields, and high-quality cocoa is not a priority for Tree kids, as Figure 2 visualizes. To the NGO, chocolate is a means to an end, the first of, as they hope, many products to hail



**Figure 2** Constellation of priorities for NGO Tree kids

from fair and climate-neutral production (author interview #26, civil society). To Tree kids, cocoa is interesting as a crop amenable to afforestation through its cultivability in agroforestry systems, as this link facilitates their primary goal of combating global warming. Moreover, the product lends itself to their campaign on account of its particular appeal to their predominantly young constituency, yet beyond this convenient link, there is no attachment per se to attaining high cocoa yields, safeguarding high-quality cocoa, or traceability. Their constellation of priorities places an accent on socio-economic priorities and planting trees for carbon sequestration, while the commercial dimension is a means to an end.

By comparison, for chocolate manufacturer Iller Chocolate, means and ends are reversed (see Figure 3), with their constellation prioritizing the long-term viability of their bread-and-butter business. As represented visually in Figure 3, Iller Chocolate places a considerable accent on the commercial domain, somewhat unsurprisingly. As a chocolate manufacturer, it is, by virtue of its own business and livelihood, naturally dependent on cocoa's continuing availability. Furthermore, its membership in a cooperative group, aims to offset all chocolate-related carbon emissions through afforestation in cocoa communities, and the intention to move towards 100 per cent fair-certified cocoa generates further commercial pressures in terms of compliance



**Figure 3** Constellation of priorities for company Iller Chocolate

with standards and requirements (Iller Chocolate, 2012, 2013; Tree kids, 2013; author interview #30, researcher). Given its aspirations, there is an even greater necessity than for other chocolate-sector stakeholders to establish good relations with its growers and suppliers so as to increase independence from third-party traders and processors, and avoid risk from scandals. Iller's engagement is a conscious choice, partly to demonstrate to other cocoa stakeholders that certification in and of itself is not sufficient to attain 'sustainability', partly to make a business case in favour of cocoa cultivation to young farmers:

[This is] to make a contribution towards solving the challenges in the cocoa sector, going one step further than fair certification by supporting cooperatives' afforestation projects. All types of certification are a basis towards a more holistic sustainability engagement. Sequestering carbon or climate neutrality is only one aspect of the plantations. The most important aspect is that small-scale farmers' income will multiply in the long term from the cultivation of precious timber. Growing cocoa in diversified systems is an attractive business case for the young generation (author interview #134, private sector).

This acknowledgement is noteworthy since it emphasizes that the prospect of supply shortages, and especially the underlying socio-economic factor of poor livelihoods, have shaped how Iller designed its engagement: at the same time, this logic also places the sustainability engagement in the wider context of challenges in the sector. Paying premiums for carbon sequestration in addition to good prices and premiums for fair certification is thus a means to the end of ensuring high-quality and long-term supply. This rationale is thus the inverse of Tree kids' viewpoint, for whom tree-planting is the end, and agroforestry with cocoa cultivation the means. This divergence in terms of underlying motivations is an interesting tension explored further below. While both the chocolate manufacturer's and the NGO's vantage points are understandable, their framings of what nuances of sustainability take precedence, and the relationship of what is means, what is end, are reversed, creating incongruence in priority constellations that the initiative has to navigate.

As Figure 4 demonstrates, NGO Planet Concern contributes an organizational focus on environmental priorities given its expertise in conservation and carbon

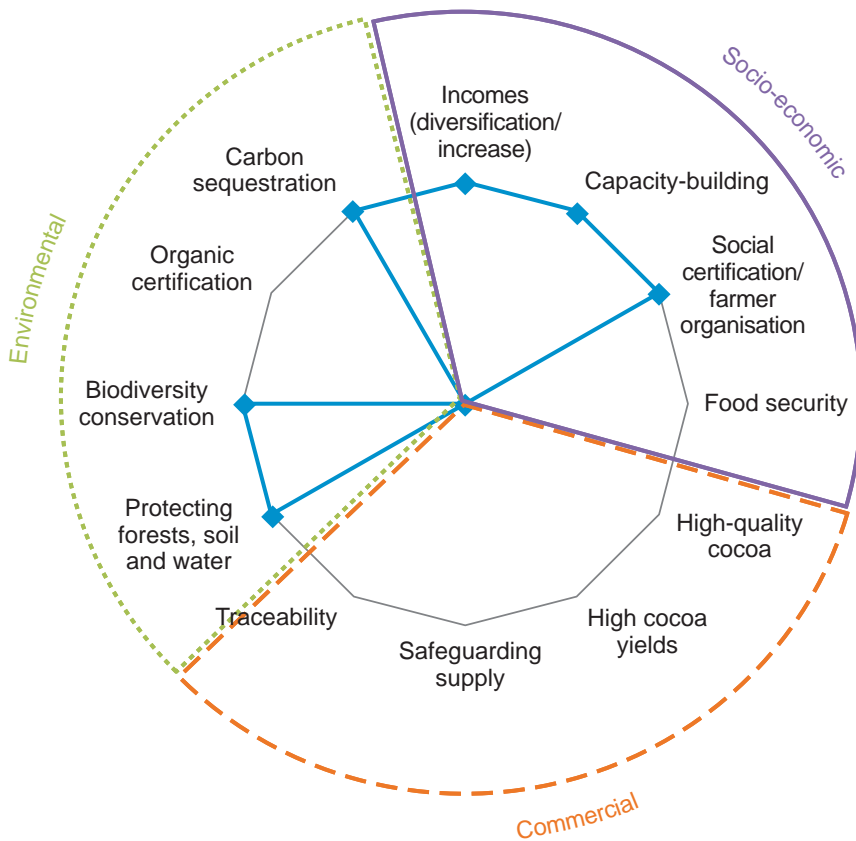


Figure 4 Constellation of priorities for NGO Planet Concern

projects, yet also an emphasis on socio-economic measures to incentivize environmental awareness (Planet Concern, 2012, 2013a, b, 2014a, b, c, 2015a, b, c). Unlike companies that support unrelated causes from a philanthropic rationale (Utting, 2007) or purchase carbon credits in locations and sectors separate from their business interests (Peters-Stanley and Hamilton, 2012: 38), Planet Concern's work allows Iller's bread-and-butter business to entail greater benefits for cocoa communities. A key component of the intended fivefold increase in producer income is the precious timber planted and its sales revenue, with further income increases resulting from cocoa, yield improvements through capacity-building, and paid premiums for tree-planting and management. The underlying rationale is that the ecological objectives of carbon sequestration and conservation would be unattainable without creating livelihood opportunities for cocoa communities that are compatible with or stem from those environmental measures; however, this link also creates a tension that is explored further below. Again, commercial priorities are a factor only indirectly, given pressures affecting the funding chocolatier.

### ***Discussion: congruence and divergence***

Even in an initiative bringing together like-minded stakeholders, diverse priorities among World Choc actors have emerged in the analysis. Figure 5 visualizes considerable overlaps, but also certain divergences. Figure 5 shows that despite considerable parallels, there is a need to discuss divergences such as Iller Chocolate's commercial pressures, and the environmental drivers that NGO Planet Concern brings to the table. Whereas a private-sector stakeholder contributing commercial motivations may not be entirely surprising, there are implications of these motivations in terms of the degree to which differing priorities are commensurable, and the need to investigate how these priorities play out in terms of power asymmetries between different stakeholders located in global North and South. Equally, environmental priorities not shared by any other stakeholder raise questions.

Despite many parallels in priorities between World Choc's stakeholders, tensions emerge firstly between prioritizing different objectives in designing agroforestry systems. It becomes clear there is a delicate balance to strike in agroforestry designs between prioritizing high-value timber for income improvement, safeguarding a contribution to household food security by intercropping (e.g. fruit trees), boosting biodiversity through conducive habitats, increasing carbon sequestration through fast-growing trees, and safeguarding cocoa supplies. For instance, supply security concerns and resulting commercial pressures to safeguard cocoa yields create tensions with boosting high-value timber and thus generating carbon credits. 'Agroforestry', in much the same way as 'sustainability', thus will be subject to a diversity of priorities ranging from food security, augmenting cocoa supply, carbon sequestration to biodiversity conservation, requiring negotiation to navigate the divergences that emerge from incommensurabilities.

Another source of tension between diverging priorities arises through the choice of certification schemes. Even voluntary private standards are increasingly becoming de facto mandatory requirements for market access (Hoffmann and Grothaus, 2015).

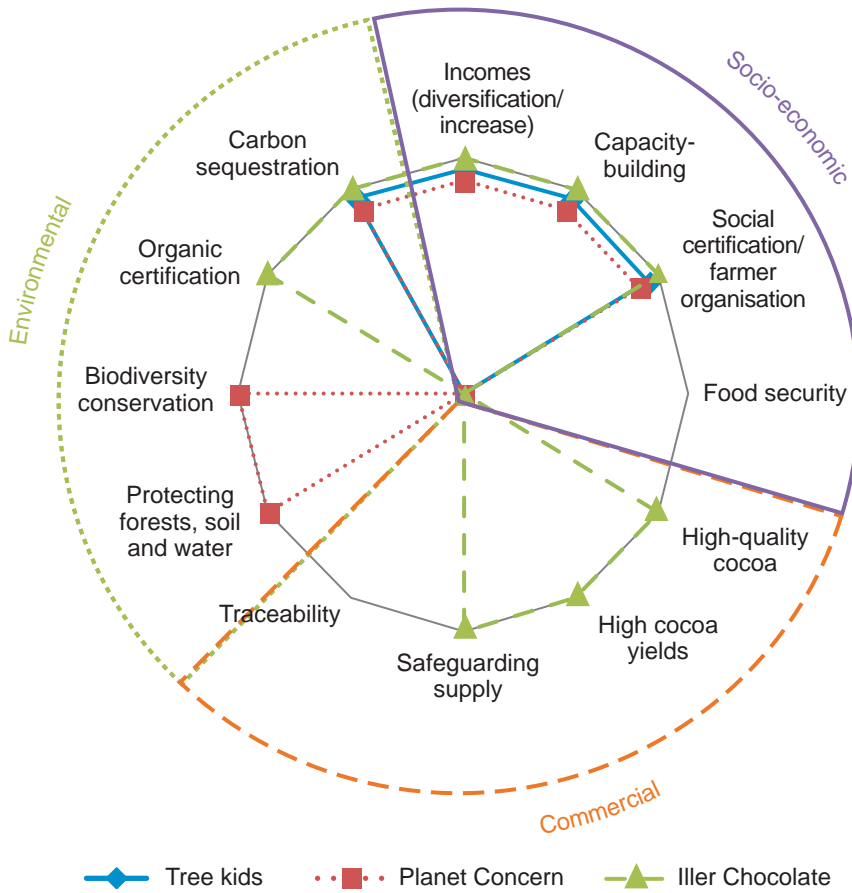


Figure 5 Constellation of priorities, divergences for World Choc

While certification schemes are often touted as facilitating more lucrative and stable engagements for smallholders, the combination of different seals can work to limit rather than enhance market access. For World Choc, the chocolate manufacturer partly requires cocoa communities to comply with four different seals, including carbon and forest certification. This dynamic works to increase revenues for growers: as a rule, growers very much appreciate stable demand and higher prices (author interviews #71, #75, #103, #138, cocoa producers). However, the combination of seals also eliminates other sales options for cocoa communities as few buyers would pay premiums for all four standards. Further research would need to establish at what threshold losses become so prohibitive as to create de facto captive grower-buyer relationships. It is worth considering these interconnections' implications in terms of cementing rather than overcoming North-South power asymmetries in cocoa.

Another divergence of priorities in the case study emerges between what is end and what is means, an omnipresent dilemma in cocoa sustainability engagements.



Between the two civil-society organizations and producers on the one hand, and private-sector retailers and chocolatier on the other hand, there are diverging viewpoints as to the relationship linking vehicle and objective between chocolate and socio-environmental measures. An element exacerbating this tension is the interdependence and inseparability of the three dimensions of commercial, socio-economic, and environmental priorities. Tree kids' primary driver of planting trees is predicated on Iller Chocolate and Planet Concern creating viable socio-economic opportunities in terms of cocoa prices, timber inter-cropping and carbon credits. In turn, all of this hinges on Iller's commercial ability to manufacture appealing chocolate and Iller's and Tree kids' capacity to mobilize and sell to Tree kids' tree-focused constituency. The premise of a children-for-children undertaking is an important factor in World Choc's sales success, succeeding where a carbon-neutral chocolate in a premium UK supermarket had previously failed (author interviews #33 and #134, private sector). This incongruence of purpose and divergence of drivers thus generates another difficult balance to strike between differing priorities.

Throughout the above-described divergences, the question of asymmetries in terms of power and ability to influence initiatives' direction emerges as relevant, both in the case study and across the sector. This initiative is something of a special case as the heavy reliance on Tree kids' constituency for sales and marketing bestows upon the children-for-children's NGO more influence than civil-society stakeholders can claim in most settings. However, even this deviation from the norm does not change the predominance of the global North, as the initiative does not establish value-adding processing or production stages or ownership shares among stakeholders in the global South. While pioneering and exemplary in terms of increasing and diversifying grower revenues as well as incorporating environmental considerations, the initiative still does not remedy North-South inequalities. However, these asymmetries have fanned the productivity-maximizing pressures on people and planet, furthering the socio-environmental challenges with which the cocoa sector is grappling. There is a wider question as to whether the sector's dilemma can be remedied without resolving fundamental imbalances between North and South and private-sector and other stakeholders. This paper proposes that another step towards these necessary transformations would be allowing growers and cooperatives an opportunity to contribute their own priorities in an equitable manner, raising the stature of socio-environmental drivers to preserve the land on and off which producers live while safeguarding cocoa livelihoods (author interviews #71, #75, #102, #103, #113, #138, cocoa producers).

In sum, while the initiative unites private-sector actors and NGOs who are largely like-minded in terms of delivering socio-economic benefits and offsetting carbon emissions, their constellations of priorities differ in the detail, raising wider questions for the cocoa sector. The balance to strike between carbon, cocoa, biodiversity and food security in agroforestry designs was one example of tensions. Another difficulty was the multitude of certification schemes, with disagreements as to means and end a key dilemma for World Choc and across the industry. Irrespective of the intention to work in partnership, the analysis showed the importance of knowing stakeholders' differing understandings of sustainability, rooted in their different

organizational priorities. Equally, analysing how stakeholders' concomitant drivers govern behaviours proved crucial. This observation thus substantiates the paper's overall argument that unpacking diverging priorities systematically is essential to identify tensions, with the author proposing the 'constellation of priorities' as an instrument. The analysis also recalled in different ways the cocoa sector's pre-existing North–South power asymmetries, which this initiative, despite its pioneering efforts, does not alter.

In the broader cocoa conversation, this case study is noteworthy because private-sector, producer, and civil-society stakeholders aspire to engage with the socio-environmental transformations required to set the industry onto a more sustainable, supply-securing trajectory. In addressing socio-economic deficiencies through improved, stable, and diversified incomes, much to producers' appreciation, and ecological issues through carbon-sequestering cocoa agroforestry, the stakeholders seek to demonstrate their model's viability to chocolate competitors who are largely carrying on with business-as-usual, albeit with slightly tweaked practices. Nevertheless, asymmetrical power and decision-making relations persist even in this initiative, with all significant stakeholders and value-adding processes headquartered in the global North. While pioneering in many ways, the initiative does not alter this fundamental pre-existing injustice, which has contributed to cocoa's current socio-economic and environmental challenges. Supporting producers in terms of formulating their own priorities and increasing the share of chocolate bars' revenue benefiting the global South (e.g. through local value-adding processes) would thus be two recommendations to begin addressing power asymmetries.

## Conclusion and broader implications

In sum, while 'sustainability' is often expected to be a force for good, rectifying socio-environmental issues and promoting genuine partnerships, sustainability initiatives investigated in cocoa (Krauss, 2016) often neglect to redress underlying power asymmetries particularly between Northern corporate actors and Southern stakeholders. Dynamics such as expecting multiple certification schemes or removing intermediaries from the production network, though increasing grower prices, also eliminate alternative sales outlets, thereby augmenting buyers' dominance. Based on my study, I would argue that equitable engagements between actors and their priorities in a spirit of fairness rather than charity can help to invite and heed especially Southern stakeholders' unique expertise to negotiate between diverse socio-economic, environmental, and commercial interests to attain sustainability in cocoa and beyond.

In conclusion, this paper has aimed to unpack stakeholders' priorities in cocoa sustainability. It argued that even within one initiative, the diverse actors involved and their differing understandings of sustainability in socio-economic, commercial, and environmental terms offer ample opportunity for tensions. It also argued that investigating these priorities and their implications can help negotiate viable balances between diverse interests. Following a discussion of the challenges facing cocoa-chocolate and the author's research methods, the paper presented a model,

the constellations of priorities, which offers an opportunity for (self-)assessing stakeholders' priorities to enhance understanding and identify potentials for tension. The paper analysed a case study in terms of stakeholder priorities, identifying subtle divergences despite considerable synergies. The exploration confirmed the paper's argument of tensions emerging between differing understandings of cocoa sustainability, recommending the premise of engaging equitably with all stakeholder priorities as a vehicle to begin addressing underlying inequalities and negotiate genuine sustainability.

My study suggests that the magnitude of the industry's challenges requires transformational thinking to shift dominance, improve producer livelihoods, and safeguard production environments at scale. In my view, cocoa producers and cooperatives, considering the high stakes for their livelihoods involved, are in a unique position to help bridge existing disagreements on what is end and means, and help identify and negotiate trajectories that strike a balance between commercial, socio-economic, and environmental interests and are 'sustainable' in the long term. To this end, a meta-study chronicling stakeholders' constellations of priorities in various cocoa sustainability initiatives in the volume, mainstream, and niche market segments could prove instructive. A systematic, equitable exchange on and analysis of the commensurability of socio-economic, environmental, and commercial priorities across different actors and contexts could be an initial move towards negotiating between different stakeholders, especially from the global South, what genuine 'cocoa sustainability' is and is to entail.

In terms of recommendations relevant beyond cocoa, for private-sector actors, the analysis suggests that upholding socio-environmental priorities even in the face of commercial pressures is crucial for the long-term viability of supply. The discussion further suggests that a serious, equitable engagement with all stakeholders' priorities, including growers', could help initiatives bridge divergences on what is end and what is means, while also aiding a much-needed redressing of power asymmetries. For civil-society and similarly for public-sector stakeholders, the sector's challenges offer a window to question socio-economic and environmental conditions of production and trade in a manner that was hitherto unthinkable. However, for commercial pressures not to prompt untenable cultivation strategies prioritizing commercial 'sustainability', civil-society and public-sector actors are key in moderating these engagements as gatekeepers, through support, advocacy, and policy involvement, and are equally essential in using their clout to make less dominant voices heard.

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